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52nd General Assembly President

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52nd GENERAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT

The continued financial crisis and the reform of the United Nations, especially the Security Council, dominated most of the debate of the 52 session of the United Nations General Assembly. Hennadiy Udovenko, President of the Session discusses in detail, these and other issues related to the work of the session.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

Every year the United Nations General Assembly meets in September for its regular session. World leaders converge on the United Nation Headquarters in New York to state their countries' views on national, regional and international issues. The 52nd Session of the General Assembly convened with more than 155 items on its agenda. But the continued fiscal crisis and the reform of the world body dominated most of the debate.

Our guest today, Hennadiy Udovenko, is the President of the 52nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Mr. Udovenko is also the Foreign Minister of Ukraine.

Joining me to talk with Mr. Udovenko are Tuyet Nguyen of *German Press Agency (DPA)* and Barbara Crossette of *The New York Times*. Mr. Udovenko welcome to World Chronicle.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. President, this program will be aired perhaps, after a number of the problems which are currently exercising the General Assembly have been resolved. So I will have to be careful not to outdate what we are talking about. But would you say on a whole, so far, this has been a successful General Assembly? Has it achieved what you thought it might achieve when you took office in September?

UDOVENKO: I think that at least for me, this would be very successful General Assembly, as well as for all my predecessors, everybody believed that the Session of the General Assembly he or she presided, was successful to the President. Otherwise it would be a failure. But this year, I think that a distinctive feature of this General Assembly of this year, is very important. Since the General Assembly for the first time, conceded in detail, a report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations concerning the reforming of the Organization. I think that there have been three issues at the Fifty Second Session of the General Assembly. Main issues: Reforming the United Nations, Reforming the Security Counsel and critical financial situation of the Organization. And these three basic issues dominated the general debate which took place at the beginning of the session with the General Assembly. It dominated general debate concerning the reforming Security Council which was at the beginning of December. Then the critical issue for the United Nations, its financial, serious financial situation, has been a subject of the consideration from the very beginning of the General Assembly until its outset. The General Assembly spent, and its Financial Committee spent a great number of night meetings or early morning meetings to

deal with this problem. It's a rare coincidence – every six years, the General Assembly considers its brand new budget and a scale of assessments. The biennium budget is considered every two years, but it's a coincidence once in six years that the General Assembly simultaneously considers the biennium budget and a new scale of assessment. These are three major issues as you so rightly pointed out that have been one hundred sixty five agenda items by count one hundred sixty, but each item on the agenda is very important either for international peace and security or for development activities or sustainable economic development. Yesterday, the General Assembly conceded the very important issue concerning with anti landmines. This is a terrible issue, therefore each issue is very important either for the world or for a region or for a country. Very often countries, individual countries, ask the United Nation, especially in the General Assembly to consider issues which are of a major concern for the individual country. I that think the basic achievement of this session of the General Assembly, is the strong support given to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in implementing his recommendations concerning the transformation of the United Nations.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. President you mentioned the question of reforming the Security Council, that doesn't seem to be making any progress. Do you foresee that in 1998 the situation might improve a bit?

UDOVENKO: This is a very difficult question. As you are well aware Sir, this issue has been under consideration by the United Nations General Assembly since four years ago. This is the fourth year that the General Assembly is greatly involved into the matters pertaining to the reforming of the Security Council. What I tried during my presidency, is to avoid a clash among Member States on this very important issue. To eliminate suspicion of each other, my motto was at this session, this is the Organization which should unite nations, and not disunite them. Therefore, we have to find a magic formula how to proceed with further reform in the Security Council....

LITTLEJOHNS: But it hasn't been reformed at all. The problem is really question of expanding the permanent membership, Germany, Japan, possibly three developing countries. This problem does not seem to be anywhere near a solution.

UDOVENKO: Well, it is not only the problem of the permanent membership in the Security Council, It is a problem of enlargement of Security Council. Again, when the United Nations was established, there were fifty one Member States who established this Organization. Now there are one hundred eighty five members of the Organization, and they are not represented of the Security Council. Therefore, we have to find first of all, what should be a number of the Security Council, This is the first question at least to me, what is the number? We have to increase the Security Council from one point of view, to have a

better representation of the Member States. But at the same time, we should always remember about efficiency of the Security Council, even enlarge it very much, then, its efficiency will be decreasing. This is a very important thing. Therefore, the first question – I use this word 'the magic number' – who will invent this magic number? And when?

NGUYEN: Mr. President, that issue has been under discussion for more than four years. Do you really think under your presidency, think that there is political will by the big powers in the UN to really reform the Council? A lot of times we hear debates after debates after debates, is there a political will to do it in the near future, and not drag it on for a few more years?

UDOVENKO: First of all everybody should be very patient because I have been involved in activities of the United Nations since 1960.

LITTLEJOHNS: As a delegate for....

UDOVENKO: As a delegate for Ukraine, I started in the Second Committee not as a delegate but as a Advisor to a delegate but then...

LITTLEJOHNS: You were also in the Secretariat at one point in time.

UDOVENKO: I was two times in the Secretariat. Once in Geneva in '65, '71 for six years and the second time here at Headquarters for three years I was in charge of the Interpretation and Meeting Services Department. We should be very patient because I understand that people outside of United Nations, and you media people, you would like everything be done, what everything be done quickly at once. In the General Assembly it takes years sometimes – fortunately, or unfortunately. And this is a very critical issue for the Untied Nations and the Security Council because it is the only Security Council which takes the major responsibility to maintain peace and security. And especially after the cold war is over, the role of the Security Council is greatly increased and its importance is greatly increased. Therefore, it is very important to be patient and to find a jointly acceptable solution of the enlargement of the Security Council. But this is not only one thing – number. Another thing, who will be represented in the increased, who will be become members of the Security Council?

LITTLEJOHNS: You mean permanent members.

UDOVENKO: Well, I consciously do not use this word permanent and non permanent members because now there is a discussion around the permanent membership, there is another for permanent and non permanent and non permanent membership. Therefore, the General Assembly will have to come to a conclusion how the Security Council will be increased. I hope that there will be a few members–permanent members of the Security Council...

LITTLEJOHNS: And non permanent

UDOVENKO: And non permanent.

NGUYEN: But do you have a plan to really limit the discussion on that issue?

UDOVENKO: You are very right. They have been a number of lengthy discussions during four years, and current session of the General Assembly, almost all the heads of delegations in their interventions during the general debate devoted to a great deal to the Security Council's enlargement or reform. Because it is not only enlargement of the Security Council, the veto right, transparency of activities of the Security Council, other issues. Therefore we had enough discussions. There should be now a political will of Member States, especially of the permanent Security Council, current members of the Security Council, a political will to come to a conclusion that the Security Council should be increased; including permanent members of the Security Council, and non permanent members of the Security Council. During the Session of the General Assembly, I heard at numerous meetings at various levels, and including meetings with the five permanent members of the Security Council. And during those meetings, especially with the permanent members of the Security Council, I emphasised their very important role in the reform of the Security Council, they will help to encourage other Member States to facilitate this process. Now, what you are going to do in 1998 to have a few sessions of the open ended working group which deals with the Security Council enlargement, the bureau of this working group is already elected by the General Assembly, this group will be chaired by the president of the General Assembly and co-chaired by the ambassadors of Finland and Thailand. Our task is to at least, I hope, that we shall be dealing with practical things with drafting, a draft resolution or draft resolutions or something like that to avoid general debate of which we already had.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. President on a practical note, I'm afraid I have to interrupt you there. This is **World Chronicle**, our guest is Hennadiy Udovenko, President of the 52nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Barbara Crossette.

CROSSETTE: You caution patience in the Security Council reform, but a lot of the people who are inpatient are often some of the smaller nations whom you've mentioned feel that are not adequate represented, they don't have a voice in the Security Council. What about turning to the General Assembly in the time you have been here. Do you see ways that you can perhaps strengthen that, to give them a sense that there is a world parliament to which they can come, and to which they can make a difference? I mean, you have used for example, committees successfully, other ways that the General Assembly can be made a little bit more meaningful for these nations who feel that they will be always outside the Security Council.

UDOVENKO: Well first of all, you are very right in saying that small countries, medium countries, are very much concerned with their proper representations in the main organs of the United Nations. Because it is not only the Security Council; ECOSOC is also a main organ, International Court of Justice, the Secretary-General and his Secretariat is also main organ. Therefore, various countries would like to be properly represented in all these organs for instance, during the kind of session of the General Assembly, and I was surprised the number of countries raised an issue of equitable geographical presentation or representation in the Secretariat. Since its inception, it has been always an issue which the General Assembly faced – what is its role?, how important the General Assembly is, and at the last session of the General Assembly, the resolution was adopted aiming at increased efficiency of the General Assembly. And....

LITTLEJOHNS: Has it been increased would you say? Has the efficiency of the General Assembly been increased under your presidency?

UDOVENKO: Well, not because of my presidency, but because of objectivity, because of necessity to increase efficiency. I can say that now it is becoming normal when the General Assembly observes punctuality in the start of its meeting. For the outside world it is possibly not a problem, but for us, late start for the Plenary Session of the General Assembly became a legend. And my predecessor, Ambassador Razali, contributed greatly to punctuality and I observe this. Therefore, this increases efficiency of the General Assembly because the General Assembly consider this one hundred sixty agenda item in a shorter period of time. Secondly the main committees of the General Assembly – there are six main committees of the General Assembly – much better organized their work at this session in response to the previously adopted resolutions. Many committees like the First Political Committee, which also deals with disarmament issues, the Third Committee which deals with humanitarian and Social issues. The Fourth Committee which deal with Decolonization and other issues, they completed their work before their schedule. Therefore, this is not a crucial contribution, but it speaks for itself. The General Assembly is being better organized and I think this contributes to the substance of its activity.

CROSSETTE: Can I turn to the famous Fifth Committee, while you are on the committees...

LITTLEJOHNS: You want to talk about the financial problems of the UN?

CROSSETTE: Is that all right? The United States has lost the battle to have its assessment reduced basically, but in the process, other things have happened. Some of the smallest nations have had their – what we call the floor – that is their contributions lowered, as well, and this sort of idea, gets around that you can now – it's all open season on having your dues lowered. Is this a dangerous trend? Is this something that you would like to see

not continue, because the Organization is in need of money, it's not overflowing with cash. And there is more and more nations asking to pay less.

UDOVENKO: Well, certainly any nation here is a major contributor to the UN budget like the United States twenty five per cent, or the UN budget is contributed by the United States, or be it least developed country which makes more financial contribution to the UN activity. But each country wants its contribution decreased, not increased. I can make a reference to case of the Ukraine in my capacity of Foreign Minister of Ukraine. We very often I am asked by my government, by my president, what are you doing there? Because we are asking only money, money, money. And to increase our budget. For one thing, I think Koffi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, thanks to his great previous experience with the United Nations, he is greatly improving the management of the Organization. I think that from one side, we have to say – be very careful with any increase of UN budget for administrative purposes. But from the other side, many nations, especially the third world countries are concerned that any decrease of UN budget will negatively effect economic development of their countries. Again, there should be magic formula. From one side, the Organization should not depend on financial contribution of one country. The United States Congress decided not to pay arrears, I hope at this stage, not to pay arrears to the UN budget. And this extremely, negatively effects the United Nations activities. You mentioned, referred to the cash flow; the United Nations will face a very serious financial situation by the next September. The Secretary-General after decision of US Congress was made, the Secretary-General asked me to convene a so called high level working group on financial situation of the Organization. He was very straight forward and he said that if the situation is not changed, the United Nations will be seriously damaged by next September. Therefore, now they may think, and this was a very strong appeal during the General Debate at the Session of the General Assembly, that all countries should fulfill their financial obligations without any condition. This is a major thing.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. President, excuse me for a minute. Forgive me for mentioning this, but Ukraine is the second biggest debtor. How do you answer that, in view of what you just said?

UDOVENKO: Fortunately, to Ukraine, the United Nations General Assembly made a very important decision for Ukraine. That the financial debt of Ukraine to the United Nations budget is beyond of – say, responsibilities of Ukraine. This, there a few things. First of all, we inherited from the Former Soviet Union some debts for which we are not responsible. For instance, our contribution to Peacekeeping Operations, the Soviet Union did not make during that time, didn't make their financial contribution...

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm glad you made, give you the opportunity to make that point. Tuyet.

NGUYEN: I would like to go back to that question of patience, or impatience, actually the whole UN membership is impatient about reform and the way business has been as usual for years and years. I would like to ask you, even those who pay a lot are impatient. Those who don't pay are impatient because they want to get in. So I wonder, under your presidency do you have a plan to really try to finish up all this reform?

UDOVENKO: Well first of all I would like to emphasise that the reform in the United Nations is not a single action, this is a process. Therefore, this year under my presidency and thanks to the contribution by the Secretary-General who started this process and the General Assembly started this process. We adopted a very important resolutions on so called Actions Suggested by the Secretary-General. Now the General Assembly almost decided to proceed with the implementation of a number of recommendations how to reform the United Nations. This process, is only the beginning and in 1998 there will be many things to be done. As far as reforming the United Nations is concerned, but I would like to emphasize that this is a process not an action.

CROSSETTE: For people of the CIS countries, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Ukraine, in the minute or so we have left. How important is the United Nations? Do they look at it in a different way than perhaps North Americans or Europeans or Asians or others?

UDOVENKO: Well as far as Ukraine is concerned, I would like to emphasise that Ukraine is a founding member of the United Nations. That was a peculiar thing for the Soviet time but we were a member of the United Nations Ukraine and since 1945, is strongly believed in the Ukraine in ideals of the United Nations and it's importance, and even now, after Ukraine became an independent country, we rely very much on the United Nations because we consider this Organization as a protector of our sovereignty of our national interest. And as a helper in our very difficult transitional period. For many Eastern European states, and especially for newly merged countries, this is a very important Organization because they come here with their problems, and they would like these problems be solved. This is a common feature for all the nations.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. President, we have only a few seconds left, are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future of the United Nations from the position where you sit now?

UDOVENKO: Yesterday I received a delegation of US Congressmen, Republicans. Young people, with a lack of knowledge of the United Nations and I emphasis that this organization is very important for every country. Be it the United States or be it Rwanda. Therefore, I am very optimistic...

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Udovenko, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**. Our guest has been Hennadiy Udovenko, President of the 52nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

He was interviewed by Tuyet Nguyen, of the *German Press Agency (DPA)* and Barbara Crossette, of *The New York Times*.

I'm Michael Littlejohns, thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle.**